

SAT 20TH AUG 77 v CROYDON (IL) AWAY WON 2-1

BLUES START SEASON IN STYLE

PUTTING their pre-season form firmly behind them, Wycombe Wanderers started their Isthmian League Premier Division campaign in fine style on Saturday with a well-deserved victory at Croydon.

The signs for Wycombe were not good when they travelled to the Arena for a notoriously difficult game — the Blues lost here last season — and few of the fans could have been confident of the right result after the pre-season friendlies. Wanderers had lost one and drawn three of the warm-up matches and there seemed a dire weakness in the forward line.

The deficiencies up front were in evidence at Croydon, but Wanderers overcame them by producing a workmanlike approach to the game which saw them dominate virtually all the encounter. Many chances were created by neat inter-passing movements and had the finishing matched the approach work, the Blues could have had four or five goals.

Wycombe gained confidence after a shaky start and took their lead from the back where Alan Phillips was outstanding. Keith Mead too, did a good job considering he was playing with a badly bruised ankle, while both full backs were reliable against a tricky front three.

As much of the credit though, must go to the midfield men who kept Wycombe rolling forward throughout the match. Pick of the first half foursome was Graham Mackenzie, who has matured considerably in the last 12 months. 'Jock' covered every inch of the turf and caused Croydon many problems when moving up into the front three after half-time.

Although Tony Horseman rarely made an impact, Dylan Evans recovered from a poor start to play an important role in the victory. Dylan got the first goal which lifted his confidence and by becoming more physical as the game progressed, he gave the home back four an uncomfortable afternoon.

Croydon 1, Wycombe Wanderers 2 REPORT BY STUART EARP

PEARSON LISTED

Wycombe followers must have been hopeful when Ian Pearson's name was listed in the programme but the Blues' top goal scorer last year was making his debut for Millwall. His absence was clearly felt at first as Wanderers struggled to put their game together. Horseman and Evans were unable to hold the ball up front and with midfield bunched and congested Croydon put firm pressure on the experienced visitors' back four.

John Maskell saved a certain goal when he held Charlie Pooley's close-range shot in the 15th minute but as Wycombe settled it was Dave Cobb who became by far the busier 'keeper. Mackenzie (twice) and Howard Kennedy both went close while Mick Holifield might have scored when he gathered Cobb's poor goalkick, raced 30 yards and then fired across the face of the goal.

Best first-half chance, however, fell to John Priestley. Evans headed back Mackenzie's

cross to the six yard line but Priestley completely missed the ball as it caught him on the wrong foot.

It seemed Wanderers would pay dearly when Croydon went ahead with a lucky goal in the 38th minute. Kelvin Roots' long ball caught Wycombe square and Alec Jackson outpaced Mead into the box. Maskell came to deflect Jackson's lob, Phillips misjudged an attempted clearance by over-running the ball and Jackson's second shot struck Cliff Hall and flew into the net from two yards. Although Holifield and Phillips almost reduced the leeway before half-time, there was a long climb facing the Blues after the break.

Phillips' effort, incidentally, came after a clever free kick move involving both full backs.

BETTER BALANCE

Manager John Reardon moved Mackenzie up front for the

second half which brought a better balance to the side. It took them only eight minutes to go level. Paul Birdseye sent a long throw into the box which eluded everyone and bounced nicely for Evans to head powerfully home at the far post.

This proved the boost Evans needed. He took full advantage of referee Maber's allowance for physical contact and did a great job in covering and harassing defenders.

As the half progressed, so Wycombe took a firm grip in midfield to such an extent that Croydon hardly had a look-in. Mackenzie swerved a shot wide after 71 minutes and then laid on a chance for Holifield four minutes later. His clever near-post cross was volleyed high over the top. Poor control also robbed Evans of a goal when Adrian Hill's lofted back pass put him clear of the field.

But Wycombe's work was not

to be wasted. With eight minutes left they won a corner which Holifield drilled into the box. Instead of standing on the goal-line, Phillips decided to make a run into the box and timed it perfectly to head the ball down and into the net.

There were a couple of anxious moments as Croydon belatedly tried to salvage a point but in the last minute Wycombe played themselves beautifully out of trouble with three first-time passes that personified their confidence at the end of the 90 minutes.

Although there is still work to be done on the side, particularly up front, this triumph will give Wanderers the confidence they need for the next three matches, against good class opposition.

CROYDON: D. Cobb; K. Roots, R. Gonzalez, A. Hill, K. Gross; C. Gould, F. Sterling, A. Prime; A. Jackson, C. Pooley, C. Hall. Sub. B. Merron (not used).

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, R. Davies; G. Mackenzie, J. Priestley, H. Kennedy, M. Holifield; A. Horseman, D. Evans. Sub. W. Roberts (not used).

Referee: T. Maber (Ruiliip).

Half-time: 1-0. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe — Evans (53), Phillips (82). Croydon — Hall (38).



ALAN PHILLIPS
... headed winner